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THE COUNTERFEITS OF THE TRADITIONAL IDEA

(continued)[1]

One of the simplest pseudo-initiatic means that organizations have at their disposal in order to fabricate a false tradition for the use of their adherents is assuredly "syncretism," which consists, as we have already explained on another occasion, in assembling as best one can elements borrowed from here and there, in juxtaposing them in a manner of speaking "from the outside," without any real understanding of what they truly represent in the diverse traditions to which they properly belong. As it is nevertheless necessary to give this more or less shapeless assemblage a certain appearance of unity, so as to be able to present it as a "doctrine," one will endeavor to group these elements around a few "guiding ideas" which, for their part, will not be of traditional origin, but, on the contrary, will generally be entirely profane and modern conceptions, thus properly anti-traditional; the idea of "evolution," in particular, almost always plays in this respect a preponderant role. It is easy to understand that, by this fact, things are singularly aggravated: it is no longer simply, under these conditions, a matter of the constitution of a sort of "mosaic" of traditional fragments, which could, in sum, be nothing but a completely vain, though more or less inoffensive, game; it is a matter of denaturation and, one might say, of "diversion" of the elements borrowed, since one will thus be led to attribute to them a meaning that will be altered so as to accord with the "guiding idea," even to the point of going directly against the traditional meaning.

It is moreover well understood, according to all that we have already explained, that those who act thus may not be clearly conscious of it; in

1 See the November 1936 issue.

all this, one must always first take into account pure and simple incomprehension, and then, we should even say above all, the "suggestions" of which we have spoken, and of which these "pseudo-initiates" may very well themselves be the first victims, before contributing in their turn to inculcate them in others; but this unconsciousness changes nothing in the result and in no way attenuates the danger of such things, which are none the less suited to serve, even if only "after the fact," the ends proposed by the "counter-initiation." We reserve here the case in which agents of the latter might have, by a more or less direct intervention, provoked or inspired the formation of such "pseudo-traditions"; one could doubtless find a few examples of this as well, which does not mean that, even then, these conscious agents would have been the apparent and known creators of the "pseudo-initiatic" forms in question, for it is evident that prudence commands them to conceal themselves as much as possible behind simple unconscious instruments.

When we speak of unconsciousness, we mean it above all in the sense that those who thus elaborate a "pseudo-tradition" are, most often, perfectly ignorant of what it really serves; as for the character and the value of such a production, it is more difficult to admit that their good faith is equally complete, and yet, here again, it is possible that they deceive themselves to a certain extent, or that they are deceived in the case that we have just mentioned last. One must also, quite often, take account of certain "anomalies" of a psychic order that complicate things still further, and which, moreover, constitute a terrain particularly favorable for influences and suggestions of every kind to be exercised with the maximum of power; we shall merely note in this regard, without insisting further, the not negligible role that "clairvoyants" and other "sensitives" have frequently played in all this.

But, despite everything, there is almost always a point at which conscious imposture and charlatanism become, for the leaders of a "pseudo-initiatic" organization, a kind of necessity: thus, if someone comes to perceive, which is not very difficult in sum, the borrowings that they have made from this or that tradition, how could they

acknowledge them without thereby being obliged to admit that they are in reality nothing but simple profanes? In such cases, they ordinarily do not hesitate to reverse the relations and to declare audaciously that it is their own "tradition" that represents the common "source" of all those that they have plundered; and, if they do not succeed in convincing everyone of this, there are at least always naïve people who believe them at their word, in sufficient number for their position as "heads of a school," to which they generally cling above all else, not to risk being seriously compromised, all the more so as they pay little attention to the quality of their "disciples" and consider quantity far more important, which would moreover suffice to show how far removed they are from having even the most elementary notion of what esoterism and initiation really are.

We hardly need say that everything we describe here does not correspond merely to more or less hypothetical possibilities, but indeed to real and duly established facts; if we were to cite them all, our exposition would be prolonged almost indefinitely, and in a manner of little usefulness at bottom; a few characteristic examples suffice. Thus it is by the "syncretic" procedure of which we have just spoken that one saw constituted a so-called "Eastern tradition," that of the Theosophists, having scarcely anything Eastern about it except a terminology badly understood and badly applied; and, as this world is always "divided against itself," according to the evangelical saying, French occultists, out of a spirit of opposition and "competition," in their turn constructed a so-called "Western tradition" of the same kind, many elements of which, notably those drawn from the Kabbalah, can with difficulty be said to be Western as to their origin, if not as to the special manner in which they interpreted them. The former presented their "tradition" as the very expression of "ancient wisdom"; the latter, perhaps a little more modest in their pretensions, sought above all to pass their "syncretism" off as a "synthesis," for there are few who have abused this latter word as much as they. If the former thus showed themselves more ambitious, it is perhaps because, in fact, there were at the origin of their "movement" influences sufficiently enigmatic, and whose true nature they themselves would doubtless have been quite incapable of

determining; as for the latter, they knew only too well that there was nothing behind them, that their work was truly only that of a few individualities reduced to their own means, and, if it nevertheless happened that "something" else was introduced there also, this was certainly only much later; it would not be very difficult to apply to these two cases, considered from this point of view, what we have said a moment ago, and we can leave to each the task of drawing for himself the consequences that may appear to him to follow logically from it.

Of course, there has never been anything that could authentically be called "Eastern tradition" or "Western tradition," such designations being manifestly far too vague to be able to apply to a defined traditional form, since, unless one goes back to the primordial Tradition, which is here out of the question for reasons too easy to understand, and which moreover is neither Eastern nor Western, there are and have always been diverse and multiple traditional forms both in the East and in the West. Others thought to do better and to inspire confidence more easily by appropriating the very name of some tradition that had really existed at a more or less distant epoch, and by making it the label of a construction just as heterogeneous as the preceding ones; for, if they naturally make more or less use of what they may manage to know of the tradition on which they have fixed their choice, they are forced to complete these few data, always very fragmentary and often even partly hypothetical, by resorting to other elements borrowed elsewhere or even entirely imaginary. In all cases, the slightest examination of all these productions suffices to bring out the specifically modern spirit that presided over them, and which is invariably expressed by the presence of some of those same "guiding ideas" to which we have alluded above; it would therefore not be necessary to push researches further and to take the trouble to determine exactly and in detail the real provenance of this or that element of such an ensemble, since this sole observation already shows clearly enough, and without leaving room for the least doubt, that one is confronted with nothing other than a pure and simple counterfeit.

One of the best examples that can be given of this latter case is that of

the numerous organizations which, at the present time, call themselves "Rosicrucian," and which, as goes without saying, do not fail to be in contradiction with one another, and even to combat one another more or less openly, while claiming equally to be representatives of a single and even "traditional" tradition. In fact, we can entirely give reason to each of them, without a single exception, when it denounces its competitors as illegitimate and fraudulent; and it often happens that, in these disputes, all the more curious in that they occur in milieus where one does nothing but speak incessantly of "universal fraternity," there come to light documents truly edifying as to the account of one and another! Be that as it may, there have assuredly never been so many people claiming to be "Rosicrucians," if not even "Rose-Croix," as since there are no longer any authentic ones; we will even add that this phenomenon of "pseudo-Rosicrucianism" in reality constitutes one of the best proofs that these designations, as well as the special form to which they were attached, are no longer in use in any initiation that has preserved up to our days an effective existence. Indeed, if there were still some truly Rosicrucian organization, it would certainly have at its disposal the means necessary to reduce all these counterfeits to nothing, and without having need to resort to public denunciations for that purpose; but it is much less dangerous to pass oneself off as the continuation of something that belongs entirely to the past, especially when the denials are all the less to be feared because that of which it is a matter has always been, as is the case here, enveloped in a certain obscurity, so that its end is no more surely known than its origin; and who, among the profane public and even among the "pseudo-initiates," can know exactly what the tradition was which, during a certain period, qualified itself as Rosicrucian?

Similar remarks would also apply, let us say in passing, to the abuse that is currently made of names designating certain "personifications," and which were formerly employed by initiatic organizations; from the moment that this abuse is possible, one can conclude that legitimate usage has definitively ceased. On the other hand, this does not concern a case such as that of the so-called "Great White Lodge," of which, as we have remarked on various occasions, there is more and more frequent

talk on all sides, for this designation has never anywhere had the slightest authentically traditional character; if this conventional name can serve as a “mask” for something that has any reality whatsoever, it is certainly not, in any case, on the initiatic side that it should be sought.

One has quite often criticized the manner in which certain people relegate the “Masters” of whom they boast into some more or less inaccessible region of Central Asia or elsewhere: this is indeed a rather easy means of rendering their assertions unverifiable, but it is not the only one, and distance in time can, in this respect, play a role exactly comparable to that of distance in space. Thus others do not hesitate to claim to be attached to some tradition that disappeared centuries ago, or even thousands of years ago; it is true that, unless they dare to go so far as to affirm that this tradition has been perpetuated during all that time in so secret and so well-hidden a manner that no one other than themselves can discover the least trace of it, this deprives them of the appreciable advantage of claiming a direct and continuous filiation, which would here no longer even have the appearance of plausibility that it can still have when it is a matter of a form that is, all things considered, recent, as the Rosicrucian tradition is; but this defect seems to have only little importance in their eyes, for they are so ignorant of the true conditions of initiation that they readily imagine that a simple “ideal” attachment can take the place of an effective attachment; we have already sufficiently explained what this is worth, with regard to initiatic transmission, to have no need to insist again on this point. It is moreover quite clear that a tradition will lend itself all the more readily to all “fantastic reconstructions” insofar as it is more completely lost and forgotten, and insofar as one knows less what to adhere to concerning the real significance of the vestiges that subsist of it, and to which one can thus make say almost anything one wishes; each will naturally put into it only what conforms to his own ideas; doubtless there is no other reason than this to be sought in order to account for the fact that the Egyptian tradition is quite particularly “exploited” in this respect, and that so many “pseudo-initiates” of very diverse schools show it a predilection that could scarcely be understood otherwise.

We must specify, in order to avoid any false application of what we say here, that these remarks do not in any way concern references to Egypt or other things of the same kind that may sometimes also be encountered in certain initiatic organizations, but which there have solely the character of symbolic “legends,” without any pretension to claiming in fact such origins; we aim only at what presents itself as a restoration, valid as such, of a tradition or of an initiation that no longer exists, a restoration which moreover, even in the impossible hypothesis where it would be exact and complete in every respect, would still have no other interest in itself than that of a simple archaeological curiosity.

We shall stop these considerations here, for that suffices amply to make understood what are, in a general way, all these “pseudo-initiatic” counterfeits of the traditional idea: a more or less coherent mixture, rather less than more, of elements partly borrowed and partly invented, the whole being dominated by the anti-traditional conceptions that are proper to the modern spirit, and consequently being able in the end to serve only to spread these conceptions by making them pass for traditional, that is to say for everything that they are in reality not, without speaking of the deception that consists in giving as “initiation” what has only a purely profane character, not to say “profane.” If one were to remark after that, as a sort of attenuating circumstance, that there are almost always there, despite everything, some elements whose provenance is really traditional, we shall reply this: every imitation, in order to be accepted, must naturally take on at least some of the traits of that which it simulates, but this is precisely what further increases its danger; is not the most skillful and also the most fatal lie precisely that which mixes the true with the false in an inextricable manner, thus striving to make the former serve the triumph of the latter?

THE TOMB OF HERMES

What we say elsewhere about certain pseudo-initiatic undertakings, and also what we have already said last month concerning some recent books, may easily make understood the reasons why we are very little tempted to approach questions touching more or less directly upon the ancient Egyptian tradition. We may moreover add this: the very fact that present-day Egyptians are in no way concerned with researches relating to this disappeared civilization would suffice to show that there can be no effective benefit from it, from the point of view that interests us; if it were otherwise, indeed, it is quite evident that they would not have in some way abandoned the monopoly of it to foreigners, who moreover have never made anything more of it than a matter of simple erudition. The truth is that, between ancient Egypt and present-day Egypt, there is only a geographical coincidence, without the least historical continuity; thus the tradition in question is even more completely foreign, in the country where it formerly existed, than Druidism is for the peoples who today inhabit the ancient Celtic lands; and the fact that more numerous monuments subsist of it changes nothing in this state of affairs. We wish to make this point perfectly clear once and for all, in order to cut short all the illusions that those who have never had the opportunity to examine things closely too easily form in this respect; and, at the same time, this remark will still more completely destroy the pretensions of the "pseudo-initiates" who, while recommending themselves by ancient Egypt, would like to give it to be understood that they are attached to something that would subsist in Egypt itself; we moreover know that this is not a purely imaginary supposition, and that certain people, counting on general ignorance, in which they unfortunately are not entirely mistaken, effectively push their pretensions that far.

Nevertheless, in spite of all this, it happens that we find ourselves almost obliged to give, as far as possible, some explanations that have been requested of us from various sides in recent times, as a result of the incredible multiplication of certain fantastic stories of which we had to speak somewhat when reviewing the books to which we alluded a

moment ago. It must be said, moreover, that these explanations will not in reality relate to the Egyptian tradition itself, but only to what concerns it in the Arabic tradition; there are there at least, indeed, some rather curious indications, and which are perhaps capable, despite everything, of contributing to clarifying certain obscure points, although we do not in any way intend to exaggerate the importance of the conclusions that it is possible to draw from them.

We previously remarked that, in fact, one does not really know what the Great Pyramid could have served for, and we could just as well say the same thing of the Pyramids in general; it is true that the opinion most commonly spread wants to see in them tombs, and, without doubt, this hypothesis has nothing impossible in itself; but, on the other hand, we also know that modern archaeologists, by virtue of certain preconceived ideas, willingly strive to discover tombs everywhere, even where there never was the least trace of any, and this is not without awakening in us some mistrust. In any case, one has never, up to the present, found any tomb in the Great Pyramid; but, even if there were one, the enigma would not yet be entirely resolved thereby, for, obviously, this would not exclude its having been able at the same time to have other uses, perhaps even more important, as certain other Pyramids may also have had, which indeed did serve as tombs; and it is still possible that, as some have thought, the funerary utilization of these monuments was more or less late, and that such was not their primitive destination, at the very time of their construction. If however one objects to this that certain ancient data, of a more or less traditional character, would seem to confirm that they are indeed tombs, we shall say this, which may seem strange at first sight, but which is nevertheless precisely what the considerations that follow would tend to have admitted: must not the tombs in question be understood in a purely symbolic sense?

Indeed, it is said by some that the Great Pyramid would be the tomb of Seyidna Idris, otherwise called the Prophet Enoch, while the second Pyramid would be that of another personage who would have been the Master of the former, and to whom we shall have to return; but, presented in this way and taken in the literal sense, the thing would

contain a manifest absurdity, since Enoch did not die, but was taken alive to Heaven; how then could he have a tomb? One should not however hasten too much here, in the Western fashion, to speak of "legends" devoid of foundation, for here is the explanation that is given of it: it was not the body of Idris that was buried in the Pyramid, but his science; and, by this, some understand that it is a matter of his books; but what plausibility is there that books would have been thus purely and simply buried, and what interest could that have presented from any point of view?[1] It would assuredly be much more plausible that the content of these books had been engraved in hieroglyphic characters inside the monument; but, unfortunately for such a supposition, there are found precisely in the Great Pyramid neither inscriptions nor symbolic figurations of any kind.[2] Then there remains only one acceptable hypothesis: it is that the science of Idris is indeed truly hidden in the Pyramid, but because it is included in its very structure, in its exterior and interior disposition and in its proportions; and all that can be valid in the "discoveries" that the moderns have made or believed they have made on this subject represents in sum only a few infinitesimal fragments of this ancient traditional science.

This interpretation moreover accords fairly well, at bottom, with another Arabic version of the origin of the Pyramids, which attributes their construction to the antediluvian king Surîd: the latter, having been warned by a dream of the imminence of the Flood, had them built according to the plan of the sages, and ordered the priests to deposit in them the secrets of their sciences and the precepts of their wisdom. Now it is known that Enoch or Idris, himself also antediluvian, is identified with Hermes or Thoth, who represents the source from which the Egyptian priesthood held its knowledge, then, by extension, this priesthood itself insofar as it was the continuer of the same function of

1 It scarcely needs to be remarked that the case of books ritually deposited in a true tomb is entirely different from this.

2 On all this again, we sometimes meet with singular and more or less completely fanciful assertions; thus, in the Occult Magazine, the organ of the H. B. of L., we have noted an allusion to the "78 blades of the Book of Hermes, which lies buried in one of the Pyramids" (issue of December 1885, p. 87); it is evidently the Tarot here, but it has never represented a Book of Hermes, Thoth, or Enoch except in certain very recent conceptions, and it is "Egyptian" only in the same way as are the Bohemians who have also been given this name. On the H. B. of L., cf. our book on Theosophism.

traditional teaching; it is thus indeed always the same sacred science which, in this way again, would have been deposited in the Pyramids.[3]

On the other hand, this monument destined to ensure the conservation of traditional knowledge, in view of the cataclysm, recalls yet another fairly well-known story, that of the two columns erected, according to some precisely by Enoch, according to others by Seth, and on which would have been inscribed the essential of all the sciences; and the mention that is made here of Seth brings us back to the personage whose tomb the second Pyramid is said to have been. Indeed, if the latter was the Master of Seyidna Idris, he can only have been Seyidna Shîth, that is to say Seth, son of Adam; it is true that ancient Arabic authors designate him by the names, strange in appearance, of Aghatîmun and Adhîmûn; but these names are visibly only deformations of the Greek Agathodaimôn, which, relating to the symbolism of the serpent envisaged under its beneficent aspect, applies perfectly to Seth, as we have explained on another occasion.[4] The particular connection thus established between Seth and Enoch is still very remarkable, all the more so as one and the other are also related, on the other hand, to certain traditions concerning a return to the terrestrial Paradise, that is to say to the "primordial state," and consequently to a "polar" symbolism which is not without having some link with the orientation of the Pyramids; but this is still another question, and we shall merely note in passing that this fact, implying quite clearly a reference to the "spiritual centers," would tend to confirm the hypothesis that makes of the Pyramids a place of initiation, which moreover would in sum have been only the normal means of maintaining "alive" the knowledge that had been included in them, at least so long as this initiation would subsist.

We shall still add another remark: it is said that Idris or Enoch wrote

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3 Yet another version, no longer Arabic, but Coptic, relates the origin of the Pyramids to Shedîd and Sheddâd, sons of Ad; We are not sure what conclusions could be drawn from this, and it does not seem that there is any reason to attach much importance to it, for, apart from the fact that we are dealing here with "giants", it is not clear what symbolic intention it could possibly cover

4 See our study of Sheth, chapter XX of Symbols of Sacred Science. The Agathodaimon of the Greeks is often identified also with Kneph, also represented by the serpent, and in connection with the "Egg of the World", which always refers to the same symbolism; as for the Kakodaimon, the evil aspect of the serpent, it is evidently identical with the Set-Typhon of the Egyptians.

numerous inspired books, after Adam himself and Seth had already written others;[5] these books were the prototypes of the sacred books of the Egyptians, and the more recent "Hermetic Books" represent in some way only a "readaptation" of them, just as likewise the various "Books of Enoch" that have come down to us under that name. On the other hand, the books of Adam, of Seth, and of Enoch had naturally to express respectively different aspects of traditional knowledge, implying a more special relation with such or such sacred sciences, as is always the case for the teaching transmitted by the various Prophets. It could be interesting, under these conditions, to ask whether there might not be something that corresponds in a certain way to these differences, as regards Enoch and Seth, in the structure of the two Pyramids of which we have spoken, and even also, perhaps, whether the third Pyramid could not then also have some relation with Adam, since, although we have encountered nowhere any explicit allusion to this, it would, all things considered, be quite logical to suppose that it should complete the ternary of the great antediluvian Prophets.[6] Of course, we in no way think that these questions are of those that are susceptible of being resolved at the present time; moreover, all modern "researchers" have, so to speak, "hypnotized" themselves almost exclusively on the Great Pyramid, although, after all, it is not so much larger than the other two, in reality, that the difference should be very striking; and, when they assert, in order to justify the exceptional importance that they attribute to it, that it is the only one that is exactly oriented, perhaps they are wrong not to reflect that certain variations in orientation might well not be due simply to some negligence on the part of the builders, but precisely reflect something that relates to different traditional "epochs"; but how could one expect modern Westerners to have, in order to guide them in their researches, notions even somewhat just and precise on things of this kind?[7]

5 The numbers given for these books vary, and in many cases they may be only symbolic numbers; this point is of rather secondary importance.

6 It goes without saying that this does not mean that the construction of the Pyramids should be literally attributed to them, but only that it may have constituted a "fixation" of the traditional sciences that are related to them respectively.

7 The idea that the Great Pyramid differs essentially from the other two seems to be very recent; it is said that the Caliph El-Mamûn, wishing to realize what the Pyramids contained, decided to open one; it happened to be the Great Pyramid, but it does not seem that he thought that it must have had an absolutely special character.

Another observation that also has its importance is that the very name of Hermes is far from being unknown to the Arabic tradition;[8] and must one see only a "coincidence" in the similarity that it presents with the word Haram (plural Ahrâm), Arabic designation of the Pyramid, from which it differs only by the simple addition of a final letter that does not form part of its root? Hermes is called El-muthallith bil-hikam, literally "triple by wisdom,"[9] which is equivalent to the Greek epithet Trismegistos, while being more explicit, for the "greatness" expressed by the latter is, at bottom, only the consequence of the wisdom that is the proper attribute of Hermes.[10] This "triplicity" moreover has yet another meaning, for it is sometimes developed under the form of three distinct Hermeses: the first, called "Hermes of the Hermeses" (Hermes El-Harâmesah), and considered as antediluvian, is the one who is properly identified with Seyidna Idris; the two others, who would be postdiluvian, are the "Babylonian Hermes" (El-Bâbelî) and the "Egyptian Hermes" (El-Miçrî); this seems to indicate fairly clearly that the two Chaldean and Egyptian traditions would have been derived directly from one and the same principal source, which, given the antediluvian character that is thus recognized in it, cannot scarcely be other than the Atlantean tradition.[11]

Whatever one may think of all these considerations, which are assuredly as far removed from the views of Egyptologists as from those of modern investigators of the "secret of the Pyramid," it is permissible to say that the latter truly represents the "tomb of Hermes," for the mysteries of his

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8 Alongside the correct form Hermes, we also find, in some authors, the form Armis, which is evidently an alteration of it

9 Hikam is the plural of Hikmah, but both singular and plural forms are also used with the meaning of "wisdom."

10 It may be curious to note that the word muthalleth also designates the triangle, for one could, without forcing things too much, find in it some connection with the triangular shape of the faces of the Pyramid, which must have been determined also "by the wisdom" of those who drew up the plans, not to mention that the triangle is also connected, to the symbolism of the "Pole," and, from this last point of view, it is quite obvious that the Pyramid itself is in fact only one of the images of the "Sacred Mountain."

11 It is easy to understand that all this is, in any case, already quite far from the primordial Tradition; and it would be of little use to designate the latter especially as the common source of two particular traditions, since it is necessarily that of all traditional forms without exception. – On the other hand, one could conclude from the order in which the three Hermes are enumerated, insofar as it seems to have any chronological significance, that the Chaldean tradition is somewhat anterior to the Egyptian tradition

wisdom and of his science have been hidden there in such a way that it is certainly very difficult to discover them there.[12]

12 While we are on this subject, we will point out yet another modern fantasy: we have found that some attribute considerable importance to the fact that the Great Pyramid was never completed; the summit is indeed missing, but all that can be said for sure in this respect is that the oldest authors of whom we have the testimony, and who are still relatively recent, have always seen it truncated as it is today. From there, to claim that this missing summit corresponds to the "cornerstone" spoken of in various passages of the Bible and the Gospel, is a very long way, especially since, according to more authentically traditional data, the stone in question would not be a "pyramidion", but a "keystone". and, if it was "rejected by the builders", it was because the latter, being initiated only in Masonry Square, were ignorant of the secrets of the Arch Masonry. "Curiously enough, the seal of the United States represents the truncated Pyramid, above which is a radiating triangle which, while separated, and even isolated by the circle of clouds which surrounds it, seems in some way to replace the apex; but there are also in this seal, which certain "pseudo-initiatic" organizations seek to take advantage of in a somewhat suspicious manner, other details which are at least bizarre: thus, the number of the foundations of the Pyramid, which is thirteen, is said to correspond to that of the tribes of Israel (counting separately the two half-tribes of the sons of Joseph). and this is perhaps not altogether unrelated to the real origins of certain contemporary ramblings about the Great Pyramid, tending, as we have already said, to make of it, for rather obscure purposes, a sort of "Judeo-Christian" monument.